

For Immediate Release
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URI researcher: Tick abundance running well above average; Lyme disease risk is high

Free community tick control workshops offered

KINGSTON, R.I. – June 29, 2005 – Deer tick abundance in Rhode Island has skyrocketed this summer according to a University of Rhode Island researcher, despite early season predictions that tick numbers could be lower this year.

Thomas Mather, professor of entomology and director of URI's Center for Vector Borne Disease, said that a state-wide survey of tick populations is finding that tick numbers are, on average, 30 percent higher than the same time last year.

"It's a little perplexing why tick numbers are so high, because lack of rain such as we've experienced recently usually slows down tick activity resulting in lower abundance," Mather said. "It is typical, however, for tick numbers to be more robust early in the season, but the fact that abundance is still high going into the July 4th holiday usually means that the risk of contracting Lyme disease will extend further into the summer than usual."

In early spring Mather predicted a below-average tick season, based on his 12-year record of alternating years of high and low tick abundance. He said that something about the unique conditions this year appears to be disrupting the cycle.

With the school year just ending and the long holiday weekend approaching, people will likely be spending more and more time outside. So Mather recommends that all Rhode Islanders take precautions to prevent contracting Lyme disease by routinely practicing personal protective measures and implementing tick control strategies around the yard. He recommends:

- checking oneself thoroughly every day for ticks;
- applying a repellent containing Permethrin on clothing whenever going outdoors;
- keeping the edge of the yard clear of leaf litter because that's where people's exposure to ticks is most likely to occur; and

- hiring a trained professional pest controller or arborist to apply an appropriate tick treatment around the yard.

Adult deer ticks must be attached for 48 hours to transmit the Lyme disease pathogen, while nymphs, which are tiny and difficult to see, need only be attached for 24 hours to transmit a Lyme infection. It is the tiny nymphal stage that is active now.

Neighborhoods and community groups concerned about the spread of Lyme disease in their area can schedule a free, one-hour tick control workshop with Mather and colleague Nathan Miller. The “Do You Hate Ticks As Much As We Do?” program “is a terrific opportunity for people who like to work in their yards, in their gardens and on their lawns to learn how to protect themselves and their family from Lyme disease, babesiosis and other diseases caused by deer ticks,” Miller said.

The researchers are focusing their workshops in the highest risk areas of Exeter, North Kingstown and South Kingstown. People from other areas of the state are welcome to attend. To schedule a workshop or to find out when and where one will be held, residents can call Mather’s office at 401-874-2928.

“We hold the program in a back yard setting,” Miller explained, “to help people relate what we are showing them to their own yards.”

In addition to Mather and Miller, vendors of specialized tick control products and services will be on hand at the workshops to demonstrate their tick control solutions and answer questions.

“The information helps people take appropriate action”, Mather said, “which should go a long way toward reducing disease.”

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